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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BRUSSELS 001661

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SUBJECT: EU-CUBA DIALOGUE FOCUSED ON HUMAN RIGHTS AND
DEVELOPMENT

REF: A. USEU BRUSSELS 1540

[1](#)B. USEU BRUSSELS 1589

Classified By: Ambassador Kristen Silverberg for reasons 1.5 (b) and (d
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[1](#)1. (C) Summary: EU officials spoke positively about the renewal of the EU-Cuba dialogue at foreign minister level on October 16 and the re-launching of development cooperation on October 24. On October 16, FMs Kouchner, Schwartzenberg, and Commissioner Michel discussed the human rights situation with Cuban FM Perez Roque, who accepted a list of political prisoners in ill health from Kouchner. Perez Roque continued to deny that the GOC holds "political" prisoners, however, and made no promises about their release. European Commissioner Louis Michel subsequently traveled to Cuba and announced 2 million euros in disaster relief aid and up to 25 million euros in longer-term aid. Michel was not scheduled to talk to the political opposition, despite the Council conclusions in June mandating that high-level visitors would meet the democratic opposition "when appropriate." However, the Commission assured us he would discuss human rights during his visit. During the October 16 meeting, Perez Roque reportedly asked the EU to consider withdrawing its 1996 Common Position on Cuba in favor of an agreement signed by both sides. Economic interests are driving the EU's policy changes toward Cuba. End Summary.

[1](#)2. (C) EU interlocutors were generally pleased with the EU-Cuba foreign ministers meeting that took place on October 16 in Paris (REF B). Valerie Liang-Champrenault, counselor for Latin America in the French Permanent Representation, told PolOff on October 23 that France saw the meeting as "rather positive" and a good start to the renewed EU-Cuba dialogue. Paris was particularly satisfied with the discussion of human rights. During the meeting, French Kouchner presented Cuban FM Perez Roque with a list of political prisoners in ill health, and while Perez Roque did not promise to release these prisoners, he at least took the list with him. Nicolas Pascual de la Parte, Head of Task Force UN/Latin America at the EU Council Secretariat, who attended the meeting on behalf of SG/HR Solana, confirmed that human rights were part of the discussion. He said, however, that Perez Roque denied that the GOC holds "political" prisoners, claiming that all prisoners were criminals. Taking a typical Cuban line, Perez Roque also insisted that the GOC must be particularly careful about its security, given the desire of "other powers" to undermine the regime. According to Pascual de la Parte, Czech FM Schwartzenberg said the EU-Cuba dialogue would continue under the Czech EU Presidency, but did not make specific promises about the frequency or level of the talks.

13. (SBU) Following the meeting in Paris, Commissioner Louis Michel traveled to Cuba to re-launch EU-Cuba development cooperation. On October 24, Michel announced 2 million euros in immediate disaster relief and 20 to 25 million euros in longer-term aid in areas like the environment, science and technology, trade, cultural exchanges, and disaster preparedness. Neither Michel's announcement nor the joint declaration that he and Perez Roque signed mentioned human rights issues. Isabelle Martinho, Cuba desk officer in the Commission's Development DG, told PolOff that the estimate of 20 to 25 million euros was only a "rough estimate" and that a technical team would travel to the island in November to assess specific projects. She also said that the Commission hopes to explore "triangular cooperation" with Cuba in third countries, but that the idea is only in the exploratory stage. Such cooperation could include initiatives like using Commission funding for GOC outreach to other Caribbean states on issues like disaster preparedness.

14. (SBU) Martinho said that Michel was not planning to meet with democratic opposition figures, despite the Council conclusions in June supporting contact with the opposition and mandating that high-level EU visitors to Cuba meet with the political opposition "when appropriate." The Commission said that it did not see the value in potentially antagonizing the GOC by reaching out to the opposition. The Commission takes seriously the EU's Common Position mandating contact with both the GOC and the democratic opposition, she said, but not every Commission visit to Cuba would necessarily involve meetings with both sides. On the other

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hand, Martinho assured PolOff that Michel would discuss human rights with the Cuban regime, as he "always does."

15. (C) Both Pascual de la Parte and Liang-Champrenault said that during the October 16 meeting, Perez Roque asked the EU to withdraw its 1996 Common Position on Cuba -- which the GOC considers a unilateral declaration -- in favor of an agreement signed by both parties. Liang-Champrenault said the EU did not agree to this demand. Pascual de la Parte confirmed this, but speculated that it could happen over time.

16. (C) Speaking personally and frankly, Pascual de la Parte (please protect) said the pressure on EU Member States to continue the political dialogue with Cuba was less political than commercial. He said European firms are anxious to get into the nickel and potential offshore oil markets in Cuba and want to leverage the EU's political dialogue to get the GOC to open the door to European investment.

17. (C) Comment: No matter the source of the pressure on the EU, the EU-Cuba dialogue will be hard to stop, absent a serious degradation in Cuba's human rights situation. If this dialogue continues, it will be critical to insist that the EU emphasize human rights and democratic freedoms and continue its outreach to the democratic opposition and civil society. Reconsidering the Common Position would show that the EU has other priorities over human rights. While we do not anticipate that the EU will withdraw the Common Position in the short term, the issue could enter the agenda, especially if the GOC moderates its behavior in the coming year. End Comment.
SILVERBERG

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